

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

Big Bend National Park is the most remote place we've traveled so far. Being out in the middle of the desert and mountains is limiting and limitless at the same time.

After leaving San Antonio, a wonderful, welcoming visit with my uncle and aunt, Dan and I weren't through with Texas. So we pulled out our tattered atlas. Our eyes are always drawn to those shaded green portions of the map that indicate a state or national park. We looked along Interstate 10, our westward route through Texas. A huge park a couple hours south of the highway caught our attention. Big Bend is 800,000 acres of the most rugged and the least visited of the National Parks, we read. It's also one of the most sublime. Dan was all ready to turn south. I paused, wanting to calculate the proximity to Mexico and the altitude of the mountains. I wondered if it was safe with only the Rio Grande serving as a border between the United States and Mexico. I also wondered if the RV could handle the mountains while driving off the big highways.

That huge green section of the Texas map was irresistible. Here's a place we never even dreamed of going on the trip. We were just three or four hours away from mountains in the desert, cacti of all shapes and a huge canyon cut by the river alone.

The drive there was all part of the experience. It was desolate most of the time. We encountered few vehicles and even fewer towns. We drove forever and didn't see a house, an animal or even electric lines. We stopped for lunch and some photos, just off the side of the road. We kept losing our cell signal, and forget about an internet signal. We didn't get "reconnected" for three whole days. No calls home, no Facebook, no checking the weather on the internet. After my phone lost its signal, I lost track of time. This amazing little device built for numerous functions, served just one purpose now, to take pictures. It's all I needed during our hikes in the mountains.

Our second day we hiked a couple miles into Boquillas Canyon. The mountains around us just kept stacking up higher, towering over us. In wetter conditions, the Rio Grande would probably have flowed where we walked. But we got right up to the water's edge, treading over smooth stones and dipped our hands in the cool river. Across the waterway was an old man sitting on a ledge. He serenaded us with traditional Mexican songs. The music had a delightful effect in the canyon. When he finished, he yelled over to see if we'd like some more songs. I think he was hoping we'd stuff a dollar or two in his plastic container on our side of the border.

I saw his village when we were hiking back to the RV. It seemed so primitive and remote. The flat roofed houses seemed so far from anywhere he could actually spend his singing money.

For the three days we spent in Big Bend, we didn't have electricity or water at our campsite. We didn't have a connection to the outside world. I saw a sign that said the closest hospital was 100 miles away. Despite that, I felt very lucky to see the full moon glow just above the mountains like in a painting, and

hear absolutely nothing at 11 o'clock at night. I was also fortunate to take pictures, with my phone, of the kids and the sparkling waters that cut through mountains millions of years ago.

My good fortune was apparent when I remembered the little river rock with the scribbled words "Donations for the singing Mexican, Victor." I thought about his charming songs in the canyon and the thin border between him and me. I felt lucky for more than just the beautiful landscape of Big Bend.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at www.ourtriptakesus.com. Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may e-mail Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com